

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Statement on the Tentative Agreement Between Railroad Industry Employers and Workers

November 28, 2022

I am calling on Congress to pass legislation immediately to adopt the tentative agreement between railroad workers and operators—without any modifications or delay—to avert a potentially crippling national rail shutdown.

This agreement was approved by labor and management negotiators in September. On the day that it was announced, labor leaders, business leaders, and elected officials all hailed it as a fair resolution of the dispute between the hard-working men and women of the rail freight unions and the companies in that industry.

The deal provides a historic 24 percent pay raise for rail workers. It provides improved health care benefits. And it provides the ability of operating craft workers to take unscheduled leave for medical needs.

Since that time, the majority of the unions in the industry have voted to approve the deal. During the ratification votes, the Secretaries of Labor, Agriculture, and Transportation have been in regular touch with labor leaders and management. They believe that there is no path to resolve the dispute at the bargaining table and have recommended that we seek congressional action.

Let me be clear: A rail shutdown would devastate our economy. Without freight rail, many U.S. industries would shut down. My economic advisers report that as many as 765,000 Americans—many union workers themselves—could be put out of work in the first 2 weeks alone. Communities could lose access to chemicals necessary to ensure clean drinking water. Farms and ranches across the country could be unable to feed their livestock.

As a proud prolabor President, I am reluctant to override the ratification procedures and the views of those who voted against the agreement. But in this case—where the economic impact of a shutdown would hurt millions of other working people and families—I believe Congress must use its powers to adopt this deal.

Some in Congress want to modify the deal to either improve it for labor or for management. However well-intentioned, any changes would risk delay and a debilitating shutdown. The agreement was reached in good faith by both sides.

I share workers' concern about the inability to take leave to recover from illness or care for a sick family member. No one should have to choose between their job and their health—or the health of their children. I have pressed legislation and proposals to advance the cause of paid leave in my 2 years in office and will continue to do so. Every other developed country in the world has such protections for its workers.

But at this critical moment for our economy, in the holiday season, we cannot let our strongly held conviction for better outcomes for workers deny workers the benefits of the bargain they reached and hurl this Nation into a devastating rail freight shutdown.

Congress has the power to adopt the agreement and prevent a shutdown. It should set aside politics and partisan division and deliver for the American people. Congress should get this bill to my desk well in advance of December 9 so we can avoid disruption.

Categories: Statements by the President : Railroad industry employees and workers, tentative agreement.

Names: Buttigieg, Peter P.M.; Vilsack, Thomas J.; Walsh, Martin J.

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